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ABSTRACT

Research has indicated that numerous factors influence teaching performance, including nonacademic traits such as personality attributes, self-concept, commitment to teaching, and gender. This study compared the personality characteristics of elementary and secondary preservice teachers. Subjects were junior- and senior-level students (N=186) in an undergraduate teacher education program at a regional state university. All subjects completed a demographic survey that asked for basic information and included items designed to measure 16 dimensions of personality (warmth, mental capacity, emotional stability, assertiveness, impulsivity, conformity, boldness, sensitivity, trust/suspicion, imagination, social awareness, secure/insecure, traditional/liberal, self-sufficiency, self-discipline, and tension). The results indicated: (1) that both elementary and secondary education majors had high levels of conformity, social awareness, self-sufficiency, and self-discipline; and (2) that elementary and secondary education majors were significantly different on emotional stability, assertiveness, imagination, and self-sufficiency factors. Because the personality characteristics of teachers may be critical to the success of prospective teachers, an investigation such as this may provide valuable information for teacher recruitment and the advising of teacher education candidates. (JD)

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PERSONALITY FACTORS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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PERSONALITY FACTORS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

At the national and state levels, recent discussions on raising standards for the selection of teacher education candidates have focused on academic criteria. Research has indicated, however, that numerous factors influence teaching performance including non-academic traits such as personality attributes, self-concept, commitment to teaching, and gender (Flaitz, 1987). This study compared the personality characteristics of elementary and secondary pre-service teachers. Such investigation may provide valuable information for teacher recruitment and the advising of teacher education candidates.

Review of the Research

Earlier research has emphasized the importance of certain personal characteristics in the teaching - learning process. Getzels & Jackson (1963) maintained that the personality of the teacher is the most significant variable in classroom success. However, they commented that defining and measuring personality characteristics was so problematic as to make research unproductive. In 1971, DeBlassie concluded that if success is defined as "persistence," successful teachers tend to be assertive, bold, and

self-sufficient.

Several more recent studies also indicate that many of the variables associated with effective teaching are non-academic in nature. Pittman (1985) found that student ratings of teacher effectiveness were highly correlated to the personality dimensions of warmth, creativity, and organization. Elementary school teachers identified as "effective" by their peers were willing to take risks, had a capacity for loving, were independent and assertive, and were more mature (Easterly, 1985).

In spite of the fact that practitioners, educational researchers, and teacher educators believe that teacher personality is an important factor in learning (Payne & Manning, 1985), the more recent trends in research on teaching focus on cognitive knowledge and overt behaviors. Variables which are more easily measured such as knowledge base, student engagement, monitoring, questioning, and interaction form the basis for evaluating effectiveness. However, the impact of teacher personality needs to be further explored. This is particularly important for colleges of education who have the responsibility to screen, monitor, and train prospective teachers.

More specifically, this study uses the 16 PF to

examine the personality profiles of education majors during the latter half of their training. The study also compares the personality profiles of elementary and secondary education majors.

Methods

Sampling

Subjects participating in the study were junior- and senior-level students in an undergraduate teacher education program at a regional state university. The elementary education majors (n = 127) had an average age of 27.9, and 94.5% were Caucasian. The group was predominantly female (94.5%). Along with age (54.1% were over the age of 22), other demographics suggest that these students are primarily non-traditional. 44.1% of the subjects were married, and 52.8% had children.

The secondary education majors (n = 59) had an average age of 29.8 years. 91.5% were Caucasian. Married students made up 98% of the group, and 50.8% had children. 59.3% of the secondary sample was female.

There were significant differences between the elementary education and secondary education majors on two demographic variables. The cumulative grade-point average of elementary education majors was 2.94, while the secondary students had a cumulative GPA of 2.36 (*t*

= 4.37, 179 df, $p<.05$). There were also significantly more females in the elementary group than in the secondary group ($CHI^2 = 34.2$, df = 2, $p<.05$).

All students in the sample consented to participate. Data was gathered during class time and no penalty or extra credit was given for serving as a subject. Data collection took approximately one hour.

Instrumentation

All subjects completed a demographic survey and the 16 PF (1986). The demographic survey asked for basic information such as sex, age, marital status, number of children, and income level. Subjects were also asked to provide information on the income and educational levels of parents.

The 16 PF contains 187 items designed to measure sixteen dimensions of personality. Each dimension is quantified by a standard ten (STEN) score. These dimensions are described as:

(A) **Warmth**. Low score = reserved, detached critical, aloof, stiff; high score = outgoing, warmhearted, easygoing, participating.

(B) **Mental Capacity**. Low score = concrete thinking; high score = abstract thinking.

(C) **Emotional Stability**. Low score = affected by feelings, emotionally less stable, easily upset,

changeable; high score = emotionally stable, mature, faces reality, calm.

(E) **Assertiveness**. Low score = humble, mild, easily led, docile, accommodating, submissive; high score = assertive, aggressive, stubborn, competitive, dominant.

(F) **Impulsivity**. Low score = sober, taciturn, serious; high score = happy-go-lucky, enthusiastic.

(G) **Conformity**. Low score = expedient, disregards rules, low superego; high score = conscientious, staid, moralistic, high superego.

(H) **Boldness**. Low score = shy, timid, threat sensitive; high score = venturesome, uninhibited, socially bold.

(I) **Sensitivity**. Low score = tough-minded, realistic, self-reliant; high score = tender-minded, sensitive, clinging, overprotected.

(L) **Trust/Suspicion**. Low score = trusting, accepting; high score = suspicious, hard to fool.

(M) **Imagination**. Low score = practical, down-to-earth; high score = imaginative, bohemian, absent-minded.

(N) **Social Awareness**. Low score = forthright, unpretentious, socially clumsy; high score = astute, polished, socially aware.

(O) **Secure/Insecure**. Low score = self-assured, placid, serene, secure; high score = apprehensive, worrying, insecure, troubled.

(Q1) **Traditional/Liberal**. Low score = conservative, respecting traditional ideas; high score = experimenting, free thinker, liberal.

(Q2) **Self-Sufficiency**. Low score = group dependent, a follower; high score = self-sufficient, resourceful, prefers own decisions.

(Q3) **Self-Discipline**. Low score = lax, follows own urges, careless of social rules; high score = controlled, willpower, socially precise, compulsive.

(Q4) **Tension**. Low score = relaxed, tranquil, composed; high score = frustrated, overwrought, driven.

Analysis

Responses to the 16 PF and to the demographic survey were scored and coded. Means for each of the sixteen personality factors were calculated by level (elementary vs. secondary).

A series of *t*-tests were used to explore possible significant differences between elementary educations and secondary education majors on the sixteen

personality factors. The results are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results

Examination of the means scores of the sample indicates that this particularly group of teacher education majors have several personality characteristics that are different from the norm. The average scores on Conformity, Social awareness, Self-sufficiency, and Self-discipline are higher than 6.0, and the average scores on Imagination and Impulsivity are less than 5.0.

Elementary and secondary education majors were significantly different on several personality characteristics. The Emotional stability, Assertiveness, Imagination, and Self-sufficiency factors were significantly different at the .05 level.

Discussion

The results indicate that both elementary and secondary education majors have high levels of conformity, social awareness, self-sufficiency, and self-discipline. Thus prospective teachers may tend to

be more conscientious and rule-bound with a need for order; more socially astute with respect for the norms of socialization; more resourceful and better at independent decision making; and more controlled and exacting in their personal and professional lives. All of these characteristics deal directly or indirectly with group dynamics. The presence of these personality charcteristics may be partially due to the non-traditional nature of the students who comprised the sample.

Results from the t-test analyses indicated that elementary and secondary pre-service teachers differ on personality attributes related to interpersonal skills and to perceptions of self. The attributes of Assertiveness, Emotional stability, Imagination, and Self-sufficiency were significantly different. Secondary teachers tend to be less emotionally stable, more assertive, less imaginative, and more self-sufficient.

Knowledge about the personality characteristics of teachers may be critical to the success of prospective teachers. If we know, for instance, that successful teachers should have high levels of self-discipline, such information may be useful for identifying and selecting teacher education candidates.

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Group Means for Personality Factors

as Measured by the 16 PF

	Elementary	Secondary	t
Warmth	5.48	5.27	.67
Mental Capacity	5.17	5.17	.00
Emotional Stability	5.92	5.34	1.99*
Assertiveness	5.04	5.73	-2.05*
Impulsivity	4.75	4.64	.35
Comformity	6.71	6.53	.71
Shy/Bold	5.70	5.95	-.79
Sensitivity	5.65	5.37	.87
Trust/Suspicion	5.34	5.49	-.45
Imagination	4.84	4.03	2.11*
Social awareness	6.80	6.42	1.22
Secure/Insecure	5.45	5.64	-.60
Traditional/Liberal	4.97	5.35	-1.43
Self-sufficiency	6.13	6.86	-2.07*
Self-discipline	7.04	6.78	.90
Tension	5.70	5.78	-.22

*$p < .05$

TABLE 1